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Conceptualising 'child' and 'mother'

Our first starting point for this paper is the relation between two fields of study – 'childhood', and 'maternal' studies. Although it might have been simpler to start with the relation between the terms 'child' and 'mother', or 'childhood' and 'motherhood', we want to focus on the collective efforts that have been made, to make sense of these terms. Neither 'child' nor 'mother' are static ahistorical concepts, and the ongoing investigation of what it might mean to be a child and a mother, as particular, embodied, and socially and historically constrained experiences, have their own genealogies. Our approach is to put childhood studies and maternal studies into dialogue to see what each can learn from the other.

We should say from the outset that we do not think that if you add together the insights from these fields, an overall picture of mother-child relations emerges. In fact, part of our argument is that mother and child remain opaque to one another, two adjacent positions of experience that simply cannot 'know' one another. This incommensurability inflects the ways that maternal and childhood studies remain opaque to one another. However, this does not mean that we cannot think about the relations between the fields, perhaps precisely at the point where occlusions in their capacities to inter-relate become manifest. In fact, we want to ask whether one field can be thought about without the other at all. What is the child for maternal studies, the mother for childhood studies, and how do these concepts anchor each field through processes of engagement and othering?

Interdisciplinary childhood studies can be understood as a 'compensatory' project, working against the notion of the child as a developing subject, on the way to adulthood, or as an always-already vulnerable subject attached to adult figures. What founds the field is an attempt to move away from both development and attachment, and understand the child autonomously, yet relationally defined by generational positions and practices[i] Approaching the child as a discrete yet situated subject has been called 'conceptual autonomy' by Barrie Thorne, and is partly underpinned in the field of childhood studies by a shift in focus away from dependency on the figure of the mother[ii]. Maternal studies has had a similar struggle. The question for maternal studies has revolved around how we conceptualize the maternal subject as a subject position that is not synonymous with 'woman', nor the subject who puts her needs and desires aside for the sake of the always-more-vulnerable child. In order for the child or mother to emerge as the main focus of each field, it appears that both must 'bracket' the other, even when empirically children can be mothers, and mothers, children. The question then is what it means when the two fields that have been bound up in the struggle for their own conceptual autonomy come together? Put another way, what is the anxiety about getting together, and in what ways does this getting together make 'feminist' trouble?

This brings us to our second starting point: The function of 'feminism' as a third term in the dialogue between childhood and maternal studies. The dialogue we wish to engage inevitably takes in histories of feminist thought, as the study of childhood and maternity is entangled with both terms. Indeed, one strand of second wave feminism showed how 'woman', 'mother' and 'child' have been written into one another, through the social and political analysis of the potential reproductive capacity of women's bodies, and forms of regulation of both children and women which reiterate and displace this connection. Feminist legal work in the 1990's on the Victorian period, for instance, elucidated how late nineteenth century legislation produced the very categories of womanhood, motherhood and childhood that eclipsed and fixed classed ideals of dependency and interdependency[iii]. Further feminist work revealed the relation

both between the regulation of motherhood and childhood, and how such forms play a crucial role in securing class privilege and empire[iv]. Here feminist and post-colonial scholars have examined how women, children, and racialized or enslaved others are also inextricably linked in a colonial imaginary of 'primitivism', revealing how these subject positions are mutually associated with 'pre-maturity' in relation to the masculine, autonomous, white, self-sufficient adult subject, who does not bear or care for children. If one impulse of feminism in thinking through maternal-child relations was to turn to history, then another was to pay attention to differences in geopolitical location and social position, and the aftermath of empire.

More recently feminism and queer studies have begun to appreciate time as productive of patterns of social belonging which has particular implications for childhood and maternal studies[v]. Elizabeth Freeman, for instance, shows how the narratives of linear timelines such as birth, development, maturation, reproduction, the accumulation of wealth, its passing on to dependents, and death, come to function as a temporal 'norm', rendering lives that do not unfold along these lines as 'deviant' and 'immature'. Lee Edelman has famously argued that the figure of the Child (and we would say, by association, the mother) plays a crucial role in suturing the social and national imaginary, such that the future of the nation and of the social bond is figured through heterosexual reproduction that subsumes all other forms of futurity. The child, in this temporal narrative, is the figure for the 'yet-to-come' and so occupies the temporality of anticipation, rather than temporalities that may be specific to childhood, such as those of immediacy or the situated present. Alongside this, we have seen analyses of maternal temporalities that depart from classical accounts of 'women's time', which has been described as both cyclical, and bound up with the monumental time of the regeneration of the species[vi]. A focus on the temporalities of waiting, duration, and interruption have emerged that elucidate how care work in the global north continues to be the domain of women[vii], a situation that brings with it complex negotiations of time[viii], (see also Rosen & Newberry this volume). Scholars have therefore sought to uncouple both motherhood and childhood from the normativity of 'development' and have proposed both mother and child as figures that are 'for the future' without needing to be used as figures for 'futurity' per se[ix].

Finally, in feminist theory, the relationality of the terms 'woman', 'mother' and 'child' have emerged as a central preoccupation, implicit in much early radical feminism that identified a reproductive capacity as the 'grounds' of oppression[x] What is striking is the way 'mother' and 'child' as categories of analysis have been both pushed and pulled in and out of focus in this feminist work. At a certain points the child gets pushed to the margins of feminism so as to make room for the agentic, autonomous notion of 'woman'. And the 'mother' becomes equally suspect for feminism, with the intensive debates reaching their height in the 1980's, and subsiding in an uncomfortable agreement that a 'strategic essentialism'[xi] may be the best way of dealing with the troubling issues of reproductive bodies, dependent others, the ethics of care, and messy borders between self and other, and biology and sociality. Yet motherhood was always a central issue for feminism[xii] and as Angela McRobbie elucidates, women raised on a diet of liberal feminism in the period after feminism's second wave find that equality is only attainable so long as they are child free[xiii]. Nevertheless, the work of granting mother and child conceptual autonomy is ongoing. For example, Claudia Castenada observes how the figure of the unfinished and mutable child is central to much contemporary social theory that privileges 'becoming', while also occupying a space within psychoanalytically informed feminist theories where adult subjectivity incorporates the child within[xiv]. She notices that just as the child appears to emerge as an ontological category that is not

dependent for its coherence on a relation with another, the child is drawn on to bolster accounts of decentred or unfolding subjectivities[xv]. The adult-child relation therefore continues to challenge our capacity to fashion theories that are relational whilst also allowing subjects conceptual autonomy. In Castenada's terms, it pushes us to articulate a politics in which 'mother' or 'child' can remain privileged terms, without producing an abstract Other (whether Mother or Child) through which this privilege is secured.

In a similar way, the deconstruction of the autonomous, rights-baring subject has been central to feminist care ethics, and by extension maternal studies. The philosopher Christine Battersby has suggested that feminist philosophy could do well to start from the question of what would have to change in order to take seriously the notion that a 'person' could at least potentially, become two. 'Could we retain a notion of self-identity' she asks 'if we did not privilege that which is self-contained and self-directed?' [xvi]. The potentiality to become two, in other words, could be a starting point for understanding identity, along with a conception of the self as always already relational, embodied and fleshy. This view theorizes relationships with dependent others as constitutive of the self, whereby inequalities and power-dependencies are basic and fundamental.

These features of maternity can be applied as much to childhood as to motherhood. We can think of 'the child' as potentially multiple, interdependent, a 'fleshy continuity' emergent at the intersection of self and other, shifting the rights-based, autonomous, agentic child-subject closer towards the emergent co-dependency of subjectivity per se, a subjectivity that is shared with the messy co-dependence of the mother. As Thorne argued, if we reconfigure notions of self in terms of relationality, even while acknowledging hierarchies of difference, then this changes the ways we understand the social matrix as constituted through relations, and this in turn changes the ways we theorize both mothers and children[xvii]. Perhaps what is now important is that we acknowledge that both analytic categories of mother and child can do the work of destabilizing theories of agentic subjectivity, rather than each field trying to claim this work as unique, whilst simultaneously being at the expense of the other.

Fields and journeys through them

There is now a well-worn story about how the 'new' childhood studies emerged in the late 1980's. This included a move by sociology and anthropology to intervene in a field dominated by psychology, and the desire to extend the practices of social construction to reveal the child as agentic, specific and rights bearing, linked in policy terms to the UNCRC (1989)[xviii]. In retrospect we can admire this as an effective instance of field building that could be compared to the more precarious history of 'women's studies' which, through mainstreaming, resulted largely in its dissolution as a distinctive academic field of research, being replaced by gender studies in many parts of the globe. Childhood studies has involved a timely embrace of interdisciplinarity, whilst retaining a power base within the social sciences; clear links to policy and practice via the articulation of children's rights within education and social work training; and methodological innovation as researchers sought to realize the promise to articulate children's standpoint. Twenty years on there are specialist journals, international research centres and thriving degree and post graduate programmes that attest to the resilience of the project and its responsiveness to developments within and beyond the academy. What is important perhaps, in giving this account, is that childhood studies emerged at a specific theoretical juncture, when researchers had become frustrated with the resources available to them. This sense that something is not quite right in the way a concept or

experience is being articulated or understood is perhaps the most valuable affect of them all. However, we might ask why is it that childhood studies may need the mother or the maternal in order to enrich its thinking? Can it do its work of studying childhood without reference to the mother at all?

Maternal studies, on the other hand, is a more diffuse field. There are no departments of 'maternal studies' worldwide, no degree programmes that take that name in the UK, and just a handful of dedicated journals and informal, largely unfunded networks, that attempt to address motherhood that remains distinct from studies of parenting and the family[xix]. Whilst it has become an intensely interdisciplinary domain, maternal studies retains the affect of embarrassment within the academy, through its continued desire to study and understand parenting 'in the feminine'. In insisting on gendering the field, maternal studies in effect feminizes it in a way that may no longer be tenable elsewhere. Although 'maternal studies' might well include the role of men in engendering and rearing children, and of queer and trans mothering practices, in its attempt to honour the ongoing reality that it is women who perform the majority of childrearing and domestic labour, maternal studies brings with it anxieties and unease. This includes concern over whether this deliberate focus on the mother returns us to 'maternalist' sensibilities, essentialist debates, 'difference' feminism and its failures to embrace multiple differences beyond the gender binary; to bodies, even if they are now spread across multiple material, affective, and subjective sites.

Perhaps what remains most difficult about maternal studies is the assertion that the 'quality' of relations still matter. By refusing to attend to what is specific about the relationship between women and children, we leave the space between them open to oppressive discourses of intensive parenting, or discourses of blame, ridicule, and the depoliticizing of motherhood. Yet to work in this space entails dealing with discomfort, or revulsion, or even the unbearable. There is an element of the mother-child relation that we want to push away from, even when that pushing is also self-destructive. It is interesting, therefore, to see a return, through maternal studies, to psychoanalytic theories drawn from the work of Donald Winnicott, Wilfred Bion and Bracha Ettinger, theories of interconnectivity, or of what Ettinger has termed 'transsubjectivity', that put the child back without naturalizing this relation[xx]. Conceptual autonomy as a project, we would argue, therefore becomes simply impossible. In this sense maternal studies refuses *not* to deal with the unfinished and unfinishable business of feminism.

During initial discussions that led to this paper, we explored the question of what maternal studies could learn from childhood studies and vice versa. For maternal studies we discussed how a focus on the diverse concrete present, that has been a focus of childhood studies, could help identify what it means to mother at particular historical junctures*;* how an engagement with the ways in which the category is mediated by material culture could enhance similar interests in motherhood and material culture; and how an attentiveness to futurity that has concerned childhood studies could be used to help think through the kinds of futuricity embedded in motherhood as a state of being. For childhood studies we identified that it could take from maternal studies a politics of inter-subjectivity or inter-connectedness that does not end in a collapse of one set of needs in the face of the other; and a focus on the non-linear temporal realities of inter-generation. As we came to write, we realized that these were the lessons *we* had learned, or they reflected the ways in which we had hit particular impasses in thinking. They involved a desire to understand the mother and the child more relationally even when the desire was also to shore up the boundary between the two.

Thinking through relational entities

What might it look like, then, to think of the push and pull between the needs of the child and those of the mother, differently? If we accept that conceptual autonomy is a fantasy that has structured both childhood and motherhood studies, we might be able to think about the push and pull in the practice of being and theorizing mother and child. Pushing and pulling in other words happens for theorists as much as for all of us in our everyday lives. What happens if we stop trying to resolve it, but instead make the uncomfortable move of reconceptualising it as a form of 'weaning'. Instead of either pulling away or collapsing into one another theoretically, perhaps processes of separation between mothers and children leads to the establishment of relational entities and chains of mother and child, understood through small moments of substitution, mediation, and scaffolding that can be traced across time and space.

Child and mother are constantly remade. Working historically and empirically, you begin to learn something about what this remaking looks like, its consequences and implications. In Rachel's research this involves working qualitatively and longitudinally with women who also become mothers, and moving with relational convoys over time, understanding biographies as dynamic and indexical, and 'mother' and 'child' as co-existent, contested and emergent, yet profoundly patterned and governed. In Lisa's work it involves working conceptually through the quotidian, everyday, overlooked, and mundane scenes of motherhood, whether described anecdotally, or 'found' in the myriad of places that maternal stories emerge, mining the 'incidental' for its theoretical import, in order that theory is never anything other than an attempt to make sense of experience.

We would like, therefore, to use the second half of this chapter to examine a fragment of a case material drawn from Rachel's study, *Making Modern Mothers,* using 'weaning', as a way to conceptualize the push and pull between mother's and children's needs, and between motherhood and childhood studies. If, as we have been arguing, the fantasy of conceptual autonomy needs to be disrupted by a willingness to bracket mothers and children *together* (without collapsing one into the other), then we may learn something about the relation between mothers and children, and between maternal studies and childhood studies, by working through the case study together.

David and Anastasia

The *Making Modern Mothers* study is an empirical research project that captures and characterises the experience of a diverse group of British women becoming mothers for the first time in 2005[xxi] The study is a collective endeavour involving four researchers: Rachel Thomson, Mary Jane Kehily, Sue Sharpe and Lucy Hadfield. Starting in 2005 with 60 participants, it narrows from 2009 to focus on 6, whom researchers followed from pregnancy into the second year of the child's life and most recently again in 2013 when the child is eight years old. The research uses a range of methods in order to capture aspects of the women's experiences including interviews, photographs and observation. This includes a 'day in a life' experiment that involves participants allowing researchers to spend an 'ordinary' day with them, producing 'micro-ethnographies' composed of photographs and reflective field notes written by the researcher soon after the observation. The method enables researchers to include children within the project in a new way. This material has been curated on an interactive digital website through further collaboration with the filmmaker Susi Arnott, and the photographer Crispin Hughes.

Rachel writes: The research began as a study of new motherhood. Children were not yet born. Over the the study we witnessed the ways in which the arrival of a separate yet dependent being acted as an interruption and provocation to the lives of the women and those around them. A longitudinal extension of the original study forced us to refocus our attention when conducting a 'day in the life' of the mothers – finding our gaze grasped by toddlers, intent on being part of the action, drawing us into communication and interactions around food and control. Further funding opportunities allowed us to focus explicitly on the children, at which point mothers seemed to fade into the background, operating as a kind of 'necessary context' for access and interpretation. The documents that we made together increasingly operated as memorialising opportunities for fast flowing family cultures - too mundane to be celebrated formally and yet part of a nexus of everyday practices that scaffold interdependent projects of selves.

From the outset we noticed the material culture of mothering – documenting the buggy and bag; the toys that had been passed down or along, and where it seemed right to start afresh. We were interested in how the objects gathered around a new baby were like a firmament, with each star representing a valued place or person who it was hoped would accompany the child as time passed. We noticed when particular objects 'failed' and were given away or simply gathered dust. Bedrooms became full and were emptied as new beginnings were initiated. The research itself was an important part of the 'firmament' surrounding the child and mother, travelling together, explicitly reminding both of earlier conversations, decisions, hopes. We periodically asked mothers to reflect on time passing using our own documentation as provocation. We extended these conversations to involve children who were asked to understand and consent to a process that had begun before they were born.

How we think about the child is then shaped both by theory and research design - where we draw the boundary of what is included in view. In this study we drew lines in gendered terms around mothers and grandmothers. Fathers could be included if invited in by mothers, but so could a friend, a sister a neighbour. Child siblings were not included, though they inserted themselves insistently. Neighbourhoods and homes were the sites of interviews, and observations. Most recently school became part of what was seen and incorporated into view. Theoretically we were motivated by an existentialist interest in self-making and a materialist notion that such projects involve situated practice. We were suspicious of outcome-oriented developmentalism but excited by more open-ended notions of becoming.

We present here a fragment of fieldwork notes from a research encounter with David, aged 8, and his mother Anastasia which captures the moment that they look at the multi-media document created through the research, showcasing David's bedroom and his account of his 'favourite things' (see 'Favourite things': http://modernmothers.org/favs/d/david.html). The fieldnote is followed by our reflections, capturing some of the productive tensions between childhood and maternal studies outlined earlier. To appreciate the discussion we encourage readers to first look at the multimedia document by following the link above. David is an only child, living with mum (Anastasia) and dad (Richie) in a flat in North London. Dad works shifts and mum has been developing a kitchen-table business since his birth in 2005, making and selling things on Ebay. Sue, the researcher, has become friends with the family since first interviewing Anastasia in 2005 when she was 8 months pregnant and each research visit is an opportunity to 'catch up'.

4.45pm The meal is on the table, and I eat with them. Anastasia has put out some nice warmed Greek bread and salad and humus, and the boys dive into the bread. It's pasta and meatballs for Anastasia and

me, and pasta and frankfurter sausages for the boys. The boys have eaten so much bread that they don't have much appetite left for the pasta and leave a lot. They head off back to the X Box and I take the opportunity to give thank you vouchers to Anastasia. She's delighted, but saying we didn't have to give her anything for doing this.

I wanted to show Anastasia the Favourites Website with David on it so she put the laptop on to warm up because it is so old and slow now. She had asked to see it on her phone but I said it wouldn't really show properly in my view.

In the meantime she wanted to have a cigarette on the balcony, and I went outside with her and we chatted. She has a little business going making super hot chilli sauce. She had offered me some with the pasta and I had a tiny bit - it is certainly a very hot one. She's trying to earn money because she has to pay a lot of money for doing her NVQ course, since she already has a degree they charge her more.

We put the website on and she watched it, both laughing and covering her face at some of it, especially where David talks about shooting 'Dad's fat belly and mum's fat bum'. She enjoyed it and said she thought it was great, but also felt that it wasn't really her family. She couldn't believe it was her son speaking so confidently to me, she was thinking how different he is when she's not around. She didn't worry about the things I thought she might, like the belly and bums bit, or where he talks about them being busy because they have to pay the gas bill etc. and said she 'can't wait to show it to my friend'. I told her that it wasn't 'out' yet and we were still working on it so it wasn't public. She called David in to watch it, and J came as well. David thought it was ok, but tended to get a bit bored with it after a few minutes and was chatting over bits of himself talking, after he'd got used to what it was about. When Barnaby, his soft toy dog came up in focus he said that sometimes he didn't sleep with him (in response to his voice on the website saying he did). He didn't seem bothered about listening to his own voice. Anastasia teased him about her 'fat bums' and asked him if she really had one and he said 'So-so' so she threatened to take something away so he said 'No she wasn't fat' and we all laughed.

Anastasia said she couldn't think why he hadn't included his Lego in his Favourites and showed me his Lego models and I took a couple of photos. But when I asked David if he still played with them he said no. In fact, Anastasia had told me earlier that he didn't really play with anything except the X Box since he'd got it. (I had thought of doing a panoramic shot of his bedroom, but it was now rather different and some toys had been cleared away and the hanging basket previously full of soft toys was completely empty, so I didn't.)

Thinking together

The first question of any case study must be - a case of what? If this were a childhood studies project this might be the 'case of David', itself speaking to a wide range of categories including 8-year old boys, only children, or urban childhoods, for instance. For maternal studies we might be thinking in terms of Anastasia: a case of migrant mothering? But my approach endeavours to think about a mother and a child together and over time – a case of relationship in context, that asks what we might understand if we just keep looking. This is an approach to 'caseness' which in Andrew Abbott's words 'has to do with endurance and thingness; appearance, disappearance, combination and transformation' [xxii]. It is impossible to think of Anastasia without David and vice versa, and neither would be available to us

without Sue's presence as a trusted researcher. From the outset of the project Anastasia welcomed the research into her world. Sue's field notes always included details of hospitality and warmth. As migrants from two different continents Anastasia and her partner had met and settled in London and were careful about gathering and cultivating resources. Relatives could be a source of threat as well as security, and making-do in a long-hours low-wage economy demanded an entrepreneurial collective strategy. The research and Sue herself were seen as something good, to be welcomed into the tight knit trio. So, already, the 'caseness' of this case study involves the relatedness of David, Anastasia, her partner, and Sue, as they appear, disappear, combine and transform over time.

When Anastasia was pregnant with David she emphasised her strong identity as a worker, and through the research she expressed frustration in the difficulty she experienced in regaining her pre-birth identity and body. Sue records that work plans are always being hatched. The documentation of David's favourite things and a day in his life, made several months apart in his eighth year, capture a dynamic and contingent moment in the life of the family. David himself is on the cusp of something: orienting towards friends in a new way, discovering the virtual space of the internet for himself, beginning to let go of the soft toys of his early childhood. Seeing David at school is strange for the researcher. He seems like a different boy. We have a taste of how Anastasia might struggle to recognise the grown-up sounding boy, recorded narrating his toys. Anastasia is busily involved in self-making - studying for new qualifications, producing and selling her own chilli sauce. We get a feeling of how this purposeful activity appears to David through noticing his remark that 'this family is too busy, making money to pay bills' … to host playdates or sleepovers? But we also know that this is about to be unsettled. It is no surprise when just a month later his room has been redecorated in a more grown up style and David is installed with a friend at the new Playstation.

The longitudinal method allows access to moments in the flow of a family's life; making 'scenes' from what is experienced as the everyday. Our interest in the connected maternal and child subjects mean that the scenes reveal, literally, how we are made out of each other, spurred on and enabled by the presence, absence, actions, reactions and anticipations of each other (amongst others). With the passage of time and the accumulation of new scenes this relationality turns into the stuff of life. It becomes possible to see how this case of Anastasia and David has *become what it is*. The way that we narrate these changes depends on our frame, and need not be determined by notions of linear development that fix subjects into well-worn trajectories. Indeed, we may be better served by tropes of dialog, entanglement, echo and repetition which chime with the choreographies of lived experience. Our interpretations are shaped by preoccupations and methods that conceal and reveal, and which themselves become part of the lives that they document. At the time of writing this paper we learned from Sue that Anastasia is now working as a teaching assistant at David's school, pleased to be in a job with prospects but also baffled by seeing the school from inside in ways that are prefigured in Sue's observation of David's day.

From a maternal studies perspective, our first thought is about the shifting location of the 'subject' of the case study, and how we might locate mum, dad, David and Sue in this account. There is Anastasia, David's mum, but there is also Sue, the researcher, who enables a conversation with David about mum and dad, and a conversation with mum about David and dad. There is the mum and dad of David's private talk with Sue, and there is the mum, Anastasia, in the field note, who has her own work, her future aspirations, her past in another country, and her own relation with Sue, dad and David, the mum who listens in to the conversation between Sue and David with pride, and some amazement. There is also the

mum and dad of David's fantasy world – not just the dad with the 'fat belly' and the mum with the 'fat bums', who are unable to play pool because they are working to pay for the electric and gas bills - but the mum, for example, whom David associates with the soft cuddly toys of his childhood, and whom he is both drawn towards and repudiates, reminding those assembled that he doesn't always need Barnaby to go to sleep. Perhaps 'mother' is a term then, that attempts to tie together an embodied subject who delights in the otherness of the child (Anastasia), as well as a form of mediation (Sue's practice as a researcher), and a mental and emotional image (David's relation to an internalized version of 'mum'). This tying together is loose, and the maternal subject is always on the move.

The conversations between Sue and David are linked, on the website, to objects in David's room. The material culture of David's world includes toys that allow some form of regression and comfort, such as the Barnaby, and the tiger-cat, and those that seem to be about managing aggression, fear and competition such as guns, a Darth Maul mask, the Dalek, car games, pool and chess. The Barnaby is held onto in a supermarket and mum responds to David's immediate need for its softness by tearing off the label and allowing him to hold it even when she pays. She refuses to separate David from Barnaby. Yet later, the cuddly toys are put away by mum, as if *she* has grown out of, or become embarrassed by David's early attachments. The guitar is a 'substitute' or fake, but David is also proud of his 'real' phone, the pool table, the Dalek that speaks, and the wooden games set. Anastasia is surprised he hasn't chosen the Lego, noting how much time David used to spend with this before the X-box stole his attention. The materiality of both motherhood and childhood means negotiations about money, and endless attempts at working the line between trying to get what you want, and getting what others deem good for you, or what you are convinced are good for others. It makes visible the struggle to identify whose needs are whose, and the relative urgency of those needs. There is a trace of these negotiations in all the objects David plays with, in his room, and how it is configured, and in how it changes over time.

There is also profound identity work going on in David's talk - 'I win', 'you'd better watch out for me and my guns'. There is his identification as a rock guitarist, and the invitation by a friend to come and see his band seem to be bids for a separate and powerful identity, someone who can kill off his opponents with a bang. The question 'who am I' and 'who am I to you' are also questions of 'who am I without you' and 'what can you do to me', and they apply to mother and researcher too. Mum is trying to get ahead, or maybe just keep afloat, and does and doesn't want to be pulled into an engagement with David. The cigarette on the balcony seems to signify time out, connecting Anastasia to her own needs and desires, recalling a time when she may have been separating from her own mother through marking out her body and desires as her own. It is also a shared moment between women. We are told that Sue and Anastasia have become friends, and that Sue comes round to 'catch up'. What goes on between the two of them? And what does the researcher want?

Posing the same question but changing the subject helps to see multiple perspectives that are relationally premised. Reading together allows us to see the push and pull between Anastasia and David that is both a bid for separation and an expression of their ongoing relation to one another. Separation, here, is not simply a push away, but also the movement towards inhabiting the position of the other, in order to understand something, that allows further separation. 'Weaning', understood broadly as a process of separation, from this perspective, is mutual, gradual and recursive. In order to shed his earlier childhood identity, David needs to return to the question of his relation to others. His questions may be aimed at

Anastasia, but in the case material they are mediated through a third figure, Sue. In psychoanalytic theory this third position that facilitates separation is usually characterized as a 'paternal' function that enables separation between mother and child. However, where feminism and psychoanalysis have fruitfully engaged, it has been precisely around this issue of the gendering of thirdness (with its connotations of the symbolic world beyond the milky dyad). Anastasia continually welcomes the other in, and yet is surprised by the developmental shift that David has taken, which is manifest in the adult-sounding recording of his conversation with Sue. Her own self-making is not a process of simply pursuing her course, her kitchen-table business, or her project of survival, but is enabled through her ongoing relation to her separating and returning son.

By bracketing mother and child together, rather than separately from one another, we can allow the conceptual entanglement of 'mother' and 'child' to be tolerated and sustained in a way that enriches both childhood and maternal studies. Reading together involves an engagement between sociology and psychoanalysis, noticing the relational practices of 'childing' and 'adulting' through which social categories are created[xxiii], and how these flesh out the mother for the child and the child for the mother. In becoming objects for each other, it becomes possible to do the work of separation, and leading from this, to become subjects through whom relationality becomes possible[xxiv]. We can understand the encounter between mother and child, and between childhood and maternal studies as a 'growing sideways' that is relational, dynamic and generative[xxv]. Thinking *through* in this way involves at least two projects of self in relationship, as precipitated by one other but also by the material and temporal properties of the environment in its concrete and abstract manifestations.

Maintaining a focus over time enables us to see the fluid character of this relationality, but also the obstacles and inflexibilities which may structure the pathways of least resistance. The temporalities involved are complicated. There are practices of waiting (to get back to your 'old life', to being 'old enough'). Things move slowly and suddenly very fast as we realise that something may have happened outside of view (our child has become someone else). Technologies become sluggish and eventually obsolete, and an upgrade or a new toy can feel like time travel into the future. The child and the mother – if thought together –express a tension between together and apart, acting as the 'other' to one other. They are each other's audience, whether they like it or not, though they may only come to realise it through the mediation of a third. When we hold them in mind within a research frame it becomes possible to notice and think about the qualities of this relationship, and to offer a different kind of audience or sense of the 'public' from which to see them.

In conclusion, we have taken up the challenge of using feminism as a space of encounter for connecting childhood and maternal studies, allowing us to think about how we conceptualise the relationship between mother and child. Our approach has tracked how notions of conceptual autonomy and relationality have become important in both fields, reappearing in successive waves of theorising. We have also explored why they may be so difficult to maintain, in the face of the pull and push of conceptual collapse and separation. Our aim has been to show how it might be possible to think mother and child together in such a way that escapes the temptations of abstraction, maintaining a connection to situatedness, contingency and intersubjectivity. By using the terminology of 'weaning' we may have provoked some of the uncomfortable associations of maternalism, while asking our readers to follow through an expanded reading of relationality enriched by this affective charge. Feminism is the unmarked yet prime mover that shapes our conviction that it is possible to generate new knowledge by engaging seriously with the

ordinary business of living as mother and child. For us the feminist encounter involves the acknowledgement of a political dimension to our investigations, and this feminist encounter has prompted us to think about what might be unthinkable for childhood and material studies.

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[xi] A term coined by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak to describe how and why marginalized groups present themselves through apparently shared characteristics such as nation, 'race', sexual identity etc., while also recognizing the constructedness and of these characteristics.

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[xv] See Zehavi, this volume.

[xvi] Battersby, C. *The Phenomenal Woman: Feminist Metaphysics and the Patterns of Identity*, London: Polity Press, 1998.

[xvii] Thorne *op cit*.

[xviii] See for example the successive prefaces to, James, A. & Prout, A. *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*, Routledge, 1990, 1997, 2015.

[xix] For example, MaMSIE (Mapping Maternal Subjectivities, Identities and Ethics) at www.mamsie.org.

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